

AN ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION

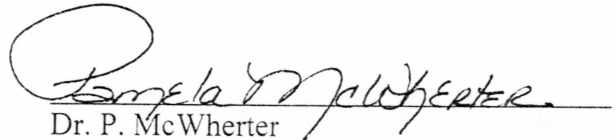
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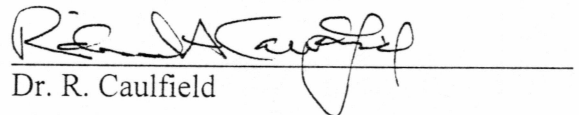
INSIGHTS FROM FEMINISM AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

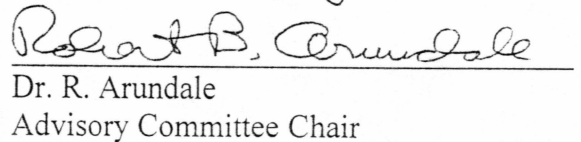
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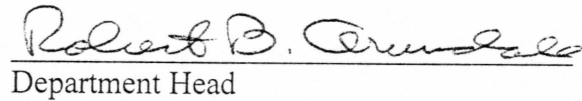
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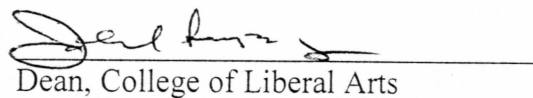

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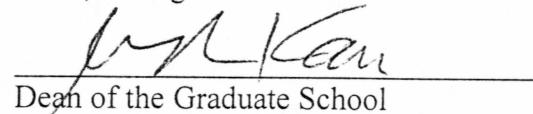

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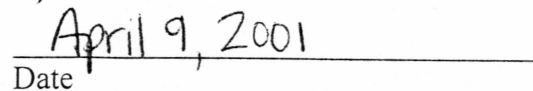

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AN ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION
FOR DEVELOPMENT:
INSIGHTS FROM FEMINISM AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

A
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Fairbanks, Alaska

May 2001

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Abstract

This study examines participatory communication for development from a communication perspective. The purpose of this study is to elaborate on communication's central position in creating, maintaining and enacting participation. I use both a social construction perspective and a feminist perspective to analyze and elaborate on participatory communication for development. Implications for both the practice and the theory of participatory communication emerged from the analysis. Implications include the theoretical elaboration of dialogue, process, trust, and knowledge as informed by communication theory as well as practical suggestions for facilitation and responses to common critiques of participatory approaches to development. The feminist analysis highlights the need for further development of issues of gender in participation.

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful for all whose lives have crossed paths with mine, and who have inspired me with their convictions and their actions.

Unending gratitude to my parents who have instilled and inspired and fostered and supported my every fumble aimed at “creating a more kind, more fair world for all who participate in it.” (Julia Wood is better able to articulate my ambitions than I am.)

Introduction

“If you give me a fish, you have fed me for a day. If you teach me to fish, then you have fed me until the river is contaminated or the shoreline seized for development. But if you teach me to organize, then whatever the challenge I can join together with my peers and we will fashion our own solutions.”

-Ricardo Levins Morales

As an intern with the Canadian Embassy in Vietnam, I worked and interacted with various well-intentioned expatriates. Although their affiliations differed, the common reason for their presence in Vietnam was to somehow help “develop” the country, economically, socially, culturally, and so on. The range and variety of development initiatives in Vietnam was astounding. Development jargon rolled off most tongues with ease and frequency: poverty reduction, women’s empowerment, participatory development, sustainable development. My experiences in trying to decode and evaluate development in Vietnam left my head spinning. What *is* development? Which techniques are most effective? Which are not? These questions, which were not assuaged by my informal observations, prompted this study.

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) explains its *raison-d’etre* by demonstrating the widespread poverty, inequality, and lack of well-being around the world, and thus they pledge to “support sustainable development activities in order to reduce poverty and to contribute to a more secure, equitable and prosperous

world” (CIDA, 2000). “Developed” countries have, for some time now, looked to “developing” countries and attempted to create a better standard of living for all. As lofty as this goal may seem, there are many who argue that development has hurt rather than helped individuals in developing nations.

Gustavo Esteva (1992) maintains that to define some nations as developed and the rest as developing or un(der)developed is to define “a heterogeneous and diverse majority simply in the terms of a homogenizing and narrow minority” (p. 7). Gardner and Lewis (1996) agree that one way to understand development, particularly in its historical context, is as a “starkly political project of continued Northern dominance over the South” (p. 1). Despite its problematic nature, the concept and practice of development continues to be employed on a global scale, and as such it remains an important element in global relations.

The last thirty years have seen important changes in the way development work is theorized, although there is by no means one central development paradigm at this time. As new perspectives emerged from critiques of the original, modernist paradigm, several important issues were raised. One focus which has become popular within development studies is the desire for a more participatory approach to development. This study will look closely at the role of communication in this participatory approach to development, and will examine and evaluate current conceptions of participation from a social construction perspective. In addition, the study will provide a feminist analysis of participatory communication for development. To situate this discussion of development, I will look first at the original development paradigm, at several alternative models which

arose from the dissatisfaction with this modernist approach, and at the place of communication within these models.

Chapter I

Theories of Development

One of the major routes to social change is through audacious theorizing.

- Kenneth Gergen

The Modernist Approach to Development

Early assumptions about development were clearly rooted in the modernist tradition. To achieve development in undeveloped areas, particularly in the Third World, it was assumed that countries needed to move from their present state to a more “modern” one. A modern nation is one which has an industrial base, which makes use of the most advanced technology, and which strives for ever-increasing economic gains. Scott (1995) explains that this model supposes that “every country [is] following in the wake of the United States along a pre-determined series of stages” (p. 2). This model conceives of development in purely economic terms, and assumes that economic growth will lead to positive social changes. Even if the economic gains do not reach everyone, “the ‘trickle down effect’ will ensure that the riches of those at the top of the economic scale will eventually benefit the rest of society through increased production and thus employment” (Gardner & Lewis, 1996, p. 7). Esteva (1992) explains that the modernist model succeeded in defining “the industrial mode of production . . . [as] the terminal stage of a unilinear way of social evolution: A necessary and inevitable destiny” (p. 9). Implicit in the modernist perspective is the notion that undeveloped peoples must give up “primitive” or traditional ways of life and embrace more modern concepts.

The modernist approach to development has been criticized on almost every front, from its ethnocentric assumptions that the Western model is the only path of development, to its economic model which presumes that economic growth will be equally and sufficiently distributed among all citizens. The most damning criticism of all is the reality that after twenty years of development guided by the modernist approach, “economic growth rates in developing countries were disappointing; in some cases there were even signs that poverty was increasing” (Gardner & Lewis, 1996, p. 15). Although criticism has led to other models of development, Scott warns that “despite its official demise, early modernization theory’s conceptual foundations continue to have pervasive power” (p. 39). Indeed, no other development paradigm has experienced such widespread acceptance. One of the reasons for this continued power is that there is no one alternative paradigm, but instead, there are a multiplicity of perspectives with slightly different foci.

The Dependency Model

One of the first critiques of the modernist approach came from the Marxist tradition and accused the modernist model of “creat[ing] an illusion of equality between nations when in fact those relations were governed by domination and exploitation” (Scott, 1995, p. 88). The dependency model, as it has come to be known, follows in Marx’s direction in its focus on the exploitation of the peripheries (the South) by the center (the North), though in the context of development, the forces of exploitation are seen to be external rather than domestic. The dependency perspective is highly critical of modernist assumptions and posits that “rather than being undeveloped, countries in

the South have been underdeveloped by the processes of imperial and post-imperial exploitation” (Gardner & Lewis, 1996, p. 16). Dependency theory also argues that the forces of exploitation at work globally will be manifest within countries, as well. Dependency theory thus provides a critique of ‘trickle down’ approaches to development, for “capital accumulation in the periphery is therefore unlikely to occur, both because of processes which suck it into the metropolitan center, and because of wider international processes which take it out of the country” (p. 16).

Dependency theory posits that the only solution to underdevelopment is radical structural change. Development programs which work within a dependency framework are primarily concerned with (re)building economic and productive structures within the nation, while severing ties with external, capitalist forces. While Marxist critiques are important for understanding development on a global scale and particularly in terms of economic inequality, there are several alternative paradigms which take a more grassroots perspective. Both Participatory Action Research and the work of Paulo Freire have influenced contemporary development theories by providing key insights on participation at the grassroots level.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) emerged in Latin and South America with strong roots in Marxist critiques, but with a central focus on grassroots level change. As with other post-modernization models, PAR arose in reaction to the failure of modernist approaches to social change and focused its attention on “confronting the existing social order and either transforming the social system or replacing existing

social structures” (Friesen, 1999, p. 291). As such, PAR marked a transition from the modernist reliance on Western science to an approach which placed indigenous/local knowledge at the center of inquiry/research/directed social change. This re-placement of knowledge is explained by Fals-Borda and Rahman in their 1991 treatment of PAR:

An immediate objective of PAR is to return to the people the legitimacy of the knowledge they are capable of producing through their own verification systems, as fully scientific, and the right to use this knowledge . . . as a guide in their own action. (p. 15)

The authors explain that once this focus on “people’s science” has been heightened, then the marginalized “are able to participate in the research process from the very beginning” (p. 7). It is important to highlight that although PAR focuses on the *research* process, its techniques and philosophy are particularly appropriate for discussions of development.

PAR relies on a notion of community or communal knowledge, but there is a clear recognition that social change occurs only when there is a balance between action and knowledge. Thus, there are three steps in PAR: a diagnosis of the problem or situation, a reflection upon ideas and solutions, and an implementation of a solution. Individuals engaging in PAR should always be negotiating these steps as they balance action and knowledge. This perspective requires that human beings be understood as *active* participants in their own realities, and that they be seen as capable of generating solutions to their own problems.

Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire's (1970) critique of education is widely recognized as one of the most influential contributions to experiential education, grassroots organizing, and community development. Through his work in adult education, he came to believe that education cannot be understood simply as a transfer of knowledge from a knowledge-full subject/teacher to a knowledge-empty object/student, but as a much more collaborative occurrence, in which both/all actors are figured as subjects. Crucial to this form of education is critical reflection. Freire posits that through dialogue, people may obtain a critical awareness (conscientization) of their own problems/situation/reality, and begin to fashion solutions. It is particularly difficult for the oppressed or marginalized to obtain this critical awareness because "they cannot exercise their right to participate consciously in the socio-historical transformation of their society" (Crotty, 1998, p. 154).

Thomas (1994) explains that Freire's concept of dialogue "emanates" from Buber's I-Thou notions, which point to dialogue as a community act, not an individual act. Indeed, dialogue is the act "of freeing oneself from the shackles of individualism and emerging into full personhood in a community" (p. 52). Dialogue in this context also requires the freeing of oneself from the shackles of being an object. That is, marginalized peoples engaged in dialogue must re-create a social reality in which they are central actors, in which they are the subjects, in which they are the agents of change.

In Freire's conception of critical thinking, one of the most important desired results of dialogue for critical thinking is increased participation. Freire's theories arose

from his work in adult education, but his concepts of dialogue, critical thinking, and in particular, participation, have been assimilated by other theorists and for use in other contexts. Thomas explains the connection between Freire and development:

[Freire] proposed the act of critical reflection as a vital element in the making of an alternative, participatory development. Authentic participation would then enable the subjects involved in [a] dialogic encounter to unveil reality for themselves. (p. 51)

Both PAR and Freire have contributed to contemporary theorizing about development that focuses on the importance of participation. Researchers interested in notions of participation and communication in the development context have highlighted the connection between dialogue (as understood by Buber and Freire) and local participation in the development process. If development is to benefit those whom it intends to benefit, i.e., local, poor, often rural, disadvantaged peoples, then these people need to be able to participate meaningfully in the development process. Although there has been increasing interest in and attention paid to concepts of local peoples' participation in development, Huesca (2000) points out that there is a "paradox [in] elevating the place of interaction while neglecting communication theory," and he believes that this paradox "opens a space for the contributions of participatory development communication research" (p. 78). However, before exploring participatory communication for development further, it is important to consider the role of communication in development theories.

Communication and Development

In 1986, Narula and Pearce developed the revolutionary notion that “development [is] a *form* of communication, not a political or economic process which includes communication as a more or less important component” (p. 1). This assertion was revolutionary precisely because of the way communication had been envisioned and understood in modernist development to that point. Although communication was seen as an “indispensable tool for making the people of underdeveloped societies more modern” (Narula & Pearce, p. 26), communication was not understood as a transactional process, but as a means of “conveying informative and persuasive messages from a government to the people in a downward, hierarchical way” (Rogers, 1976, p. 133). Thus, in modernist development models, communication was conceived of and examined in terms of the “message” rather than the process. As a result, theories of media persuasion and marketing were the primary theories employed in the planning and implementation of development programs. In this framework, even the concept of participation was treated as a matter of persuasion. Jacobson and Kolluri (1999) indicate that participation was advanced as a method that could be used, particularly in media programming, to ensure better success rates in development. The result was development programs which consulted with local peoples about their dis/likes as grounds for creating the most effective messages. This is certainly not participation in the spirit of PAR. Narula and Pearce document some of the simplistic and ultimately destructive notions of communication:

Development strategists thought of communication (that is, the mass media) as “conveying” a commodity to the masses. Acquiring information and education as commodities, they thought, the masses would acquire more “modern” attitudes, adopt innovations, and participate in an increasingly industrialized economy (p. 27).

These one-dimensional conceptions of communication treat individuals as objects, deny them agency and rely on the assumption that listeners are simply passive receivers of messages which are crafted (either well or poorly) by the sender. In contrast, both PAR and Freire highlight the importance of viewing individuals as active participants in social change, negating the concept of the “passive receiver.”

The links between PAR and communication need to be examined more carefully, for, although it is through communication that knowledge systems are shared and solutions generated, in PAR there is no specific treatment of communication as the means by which participation happens. Freire, with his emphasis on dialogue provides a clearer acknowledgement of the importance of communication as the means to achieve critical awareness. But ultimately, both of these approaches to social change view communication as one tool among many that a community can use in its struggles. Neither clearly examines the link between communication and participation.

Participatory Communication for Development

As ideas about Participatory Action Research were emerging in Central and South America, so too were critiques of modernist models which placed communication at the center of development. As Jacobson and Kolluri helpfully point out, “Rogers (1983) [in

his landmark survey of communication and development] redefined development in a general way as participatory” (p. 267). Later, as noted above, Narula and Pearce (1986) brought the role of communication in development to the forefront when they asserted that development should be understood as “a *form* of communication” (p. 1), not as a process which simply includes communication among other components.

Notions of participation and of communication have been linked for quite some time, though definitions of participatory communication have been highly varied. Jacobson (1994) maintains that these “differences in definition and expectations regarding participation [need] not necessarily indicate that participation is unsuitable as a paradigm” (p. 61). “Participatory communication for development”, or PCD, as this perspective has come to be known, draws on both Freire and PAR, but focuses particularly on the role of communication in development. In one definition, Jacobson and Kolluri (1999) indicate that PCD occurs when “source and receiver interact continuously, thinking constructively about the situation, identifying developmental needs and problems, deciding what is needed to improve the situation, and acting upon it” (p. 269).

Although there are various other definitions, three key concepts underlie most definitions of PCD. The first concerns the process of participation, which involves the collective investigation and analysis of a problem, generation of solutions, and group action. The influences of both PAR and Freire can be clearly seen in this process, which presumes local participation at every stage of the development process. It is important to recognize that groups will not necessarily move sequentially through these three steps,

but rather will be continually negotiating all three stages as they strive to solve the problem.

A second important element of PCD is the nature of facilitation. PCD requires that development agents act as catalysts for change, and work to create an environment which is conducive to people's critical realizations. Facilitators of participation must be sensitive to local traditions, and spend extended periods of time living and interacting with local people. Implicit in these requirements for facilitation is a validation of local knowledges. The third key aspect central to definitions of PCD is the requirement that local or indigenous knowledge must occupy a central role in development planning. Influenced by PAR and Freire, PCD considers people as experts in their own realities. As such, with the appropriate catalyst, they are capable of changing their oppressive situations.

Despite the linkage between participation and communication in PCD, communication continues to be seen as but one element of the participation process, rather than as the one fundamental element that makes participation possible in the first place. As Friesen (1999) notes, "knowledgeable human agents, through repetitive social practices, produce and reproduce the social conditions that affect them" (Friesen, 1999, p. 294). This position echoes Pearce's (1995) descriptions of the social-constructionist way of understanding the world. From a social construction perspective, the world is not an objective reality which can be observed and thus known by humans. Instead, human understanding of the world is a collaborative creative process. Pearce and Pearce (2000) take the notion of social construction one step further and posit the

“communication perspective” which holds that “the events and objects of the social world . . . [are] co-constructed by the coordinated actions of . . . persons-in-conversation” (p. 408). This perspective underscores the centrality of communication, for it is in everyday conversation that we create and re-create our social worlds.

It is from this perspective on communication as a fundamental human process that I will conduct an examination of participatory communication for development. In doing so, I am responding to Jacobson and Kolluri’s (1999) assertion that even after twenty years of various contributions to PCD, “no single definition has been both systematically elaborated and widely accepted” (p. 269). In particular, using a social construction framework, I will systematically examine the central position of communication in creating, maintaining and enacting participation.

In addition, I will examine issues of gender in PCD by from a postmodern feminist perspective. I make the assumption that the historic and continued oppression of women worldwide, particularly in developing countries, demands that any attempt at achieving social change must work against this oppression. By using feminism to evaluate PCD, I assess the extent to which this theory accommodates gender concerns in the development process. By carefully examining participatory communication for development from a social construction perspective as well as from a feminist perspective, I am not only evaluating this concept’s strengths and weaknesses, but I am contributing to the much-needed definition of participatory communication for development.

Chapter II

A Social Construction Perspective

“To be means to communicate.”

- Mikhail Bakhtin

Participatory Communication for Development (PCD) is a theory which combines approaches to participation in development, as influenced by Paulo Freire and Participatory Action Research (PAR), with a focus on communication. At present, definitions of PCD remain “highly varied” (Jacobson & Kolluri, 1999, p. 268), which is detrimental to the development of the theory and makes it difficult to respond to critiques of participatory approaches. Additionally, without careful attention to the assumptions about communication in PCD, there is a danger of continuing to promote faulty or unsupportive communication strategies in development.

My first broad goal is to examine PCD from a social construction perspective in that social construction offers a framework for examining communication as the central element of this theory. To accomplish this goal, I first define what is meant by the social construction of reality, and development the central place of communication in this perspective. In linking social construction and communication, I introduce a co-construction model of communication. I then employ a co-construction framework to examine the notion of dialogue as a communication process.

A second important goal responds to Waters’ (2000) assertion that discussions of participatory approaches to development communication have not yet clearly examined

the “communicative procedures that occur in project situations where external practitioners . . . work with local communities to solve development problems” (p. 90). She believes that a consideration of these procedures “demands [a] more focused analysis of how participation is actually produced, perceived, and represented” (p. 90). I will employ social construction in such an analysis. To achieve my second goal, I carefully analyze the three key aspects of PCD presented earlier: the process of participation, the nature of facilitation, and the importance of local knowledge. Examining these three aspects of PCD in turn provides grounds for productive responses to some common critiques of participation.

The Social Construction of Reality

The social construction of reality refers to a particular set of perspectives on how humans come to know the world. This paradigm arose from critiques of positivist assumptions about the world, and in particular the positivist ambition to discover the objective Truth about life/humans/the world. Social constructionists reject the assumption that meaning exists in some tangible form independent of human thought, and instead posits that meaning is *constructed* in social interaction. Social constructionists do not deny the existence of a tangible reality, but they insist that “meaning is not discovered, [it is] constructed. Meaning does not inhere in the object, merely waiting for someone to come upon it” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Social constructionists argue that such meaning is “constructed, sustained and reproduced through social life” (p. 55).

This notion of sociality is essential to social construction, and it underscores the central importance of communication to reality construction. That is, if it is through social interaction that we create and give meaning to our worlds, then “when we communicate, we are not just talking about the world, we are literally participating in the creation of the social universe” (Pearce, 1995, p. 75). Social construction is an appropriate perspective from which to examine theories of social change, such as PCD, for it provides a space for conceptions of communication as transformatory. This way of looking at the world demands recognition of the “power of language to make new and different things possible” (Gergen, 1999, p. 18). Although social construction perspectives assume that reality is constructed in communication, most theorists do not carefully examine the details of the processes through which meanings are constructed. In order to fully account for the place of communication in reality construction, we must look at interaction in terms of co-construction.

A Co-construction Model for Communication

In examining the communication processes central to social construction, a co-construction perspective presents “communication as a phenomenon that emerges in dynamic inter-action” (Arundale, 1999, p. 126). Communication is interactional in that each participant’s current interpretations and contributions are linked to their own prior interpretations and contributions, and to the contributions of others. Each participant’s interpretations and contributions are also linked to expectations for their own and the other’s future interpretations. Communication is dynamic in that participants’ interpretations and contributions are continually developing and changing in concert with

one another. One's response is interdependent with the other's contribution, and vice versa, so that neither can be examined or understood apart from the other. Thus, in conversation, participants are always mutually changing, modifying, creating, confirming, re-creating, and maintaining meaning. This process of reality creation emerges as "participants produce adjacent utterances and in so doing mutually constrain and reciprocally influence one another's formulating of interpretations" (p. 126).

A co-construction understanding of communication differs substantially from most common assumptions about the nature of communication. Most people talk about and understand the process of communication as an encoding/decoding model of communication which presumes that senders take their meanings and encode them into language which is then decoded by the receiver. The assumption is that as long as the sender and the receiver share the same code (language), successful communication will be achieved. Clearly, this model of communication does not acknowledge the place of interaction in creating meaning. Communication is instead seen to be an individual event, in which one individual as subject acts upon another individual as object. The co-construction model of communication, however, insists that the "conversational interaction [is] the primordial locus for . . . sense-making" (Jacoby & Ochs, 1995, p. 172). It is the dyad or the interaction itself which is the essential unit in communication, *not* the individual.

Whereas social construction is concerned with a larger system of co-constructed moments, the co-construction model provides a framework for examining the creation of meaning in face-to-face interaction,. Stewart (1995) argues that human dynamic

understanding “occurs in contact between persons, that is, the event is irreducibly dialogical” (p. 36). He then argues that “the ongoing process of understanding-via-languaging is the human’s way of constituting world” (p. 36). For the purpose of this study, co-construction can provide insights into the face-to-face, communicative element of participation, while social construction provides a framework for discussions of the larger social processes involved in a long-term development or community project.

Dialogue as a Communication Process

Central to the concept of participation is the belief, as articulated by Freire (1970), that true participation requires dialogic interaction. In particular, Freire’s processes of investigation, analysis, and action must be the product of critical thinking, which “perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity – thinking which does not separate itself from action” (p. 81). This collaboration of thinking and action is precisely what Freire means by dialogue. Indeed, dialogue both “requires critical thinking, [and] is also capable of generating critical thinking” (p. 81). Dialogue, as a particular type of communication, is therefore required for successful participation, however, as Jacobson and Kolluri (1999) explain, PCD lacks a “framework explaining specifically what constitutes dialogue and how one might evaluate it as a communication process” (p. 273). Co-construction provides one such framework.

Cissna and Anderson (1998) argue that dialogue is neither an individual process, nor ahistorical, and that moments of dialogue are “reality defining, and may even be world making” (p. 64). Cissna and Anderson focus heavily on the notion that dialogue is something which occurs only occasionally, and only momentarily. They look to Buber

(as did Freire) for a definition of dialogue as mutuality, which is different from “reciprocity, in which one person does something for or to another, and in return the other is allowed or expected to do something for the first” (p. 69). Mutuality occurs when “we do something together which neither of us can do separately” (p. 69). This focus on the relationship echoes the co-construction emphasis on the dyad as the site of reality construction.

Stewart and Zediker (2000) examine dialogue from an even more communication-centric position, and propose that dialogue can be understood either descriptively or prescriptively. The authors distinguish between Bakhtin’s descriptive approach to dialogue which simply asserts that because humans are irreducibly social beings, “dialogue is a prominent, pervasive, and consequential feature of the human condition” (p. 226), and Buber and Freire’s prescriptive approach which treats dialogue as an ideal to be strived toward or a goal to be achieved. Stewart and Zediker believe that a prescriptive approach to dialogue is especially useful because it “can serve as an ideal toward which communication may fruitfully move in many different contexts, including . . . teacher-student and peer relationships in education . . . and citizen deliberative relationships in politics” (pp. 228-9). Stewart and Zediker’s prescriptive approach is consistent with the centrality of dialogue to the process of participation.

In developing the characteristics of a prescriptive view of dialogue, the authors assert that it is situated, relational, and tensional. That is, dialogue is situational as it “can be enhanced or blocked by time available, exigencies of space, presence or absence of an audience, role definitions, and cultural norms” (p. 230). It is relational because it

happens between persons, and as such, no one person ultimately controls its occurrence. Because of the situated, relational nature of dialogue, it is “impossible to offer a technology of specified ‘moves’ that will guarantee that an encounter will be dialogic” (p. 231). In explaining the tensional nature of dialogue, the authors highlight the tension of “letting the other happen to me while holding my own ground” (p. 234) as the fundamental tension:

The other happens to me while and as I hold my own ground, and as a result, she happens to me-as-occupant-of-a-position. I hold my own ground in the light of the other’s happening to me, and as a result my position is fundamentally-influenced-by-the-other. (p. 234)

The authors believe that a focus on the tensional both/and nature of dialogue increases the likelihood that dialogue will occur.

In addition, participants to a dialogic interaction must be capable of making “choices between and among multivocal, tensional perspectives and assertions, [for] as praxis, dialogue involves the processes of making and evaluating moral judgments about and through communication” (p. 240). It is through making such choices that participants achieve “a kind of collaborative and emergent engagement that can be widely fruitful” (p. 240). Freire’s focus on critical thinking as a key element in dialogue seems particularly appropriate when viewed within the context of this fundamental tension. This prescriptive understanding of dialogue acknowledges the centrality of face-to-face communication as informed by co-construction. As participants make communicative choices, they actively and collaboratively construct the possibility for dialogue. In so

doing they provide the conditions for participatory communication for development. A co-construction focus on dialogue and consequently on the process of participation requires that communication be viewed, not simply as the means for achieving participation, but as the foundation for all interaction, including interaction that strives toward dialogue as a communicative ideal.

The Process of Participation

The first aspect of PCD that requires further treatment is the process involved in participatory interaction. Beyond providing a clearer understanding of communication in the process of participation, introducing the concept of co-construction also provides the basis for a more careful examination of the process of participation, and for responses to certain critiques of PCD. Both Servaes and Arnst (1999) and Jacobson and Kolluri (1999) assert that the process of participation includes the collective definition and evaluation of a problem, and the development and implementation of group-generated solutions to this problem. Servaes and Arnst identify three steps in this process:

1. Collective definition and investigation of a problem by a group of people struggling to deal with it. This involves the social investigation that determines the concrete condition existing within the community under study, by those embedded in the social context.
2. Group analysis of the underlying causes of their problems.
3. Group action to attempt to solve the problem. (p. 111)

While the first step involves the collective definition of a problem by the participants, who are presumably both local and outside facilitators, a co-construction

framework tells us that “collective” definition must always occur in the interaction between individuals, through a process in which each participant “formulates interpretations that develop and change over time, contingent upon the prior and subsequent actions of the co-participant(s)” (Arundale, 1999, p. 126). From this perspective, it is apparent that co-interpretations occur over time, and as such, group interpretations, or collective definition, or social constructions will occur over even longer periods of time. Recognizing that this basic first step in the process of participation is one that must occur over time is important for funding agencies and task-focused facilitators. Without proper preparation, this process may appear to many as unfocused, or unproductive. The development worker or agency must then be prepared, before and throughout the process, to clearly explain and justify this approach to social change.

Servaes and Arnst’s second and third steps include group analysis and group action with respect to the problem that has been collaboratively defined. However, this division of reflection and analysis is contrary to Freire’s (1970) distinction between both “verbalism (reflection alone)” and “activism (action alone)” and “dialogue (praxis: reflection *and* action)” (p. 172). A focus on dialogue as the foundation for the process of participation, particularly from a co-construction framework, requires that participants understand that action and reflection are intertwined. Neither can be successfully performed or understood without the other. Indeed, to first analyze and then act is to deny the importance of dialogue, and the solutions which will *emerge* from dialogic interactions.

Rahnema (1992) warns that often in participatory projects, “rather than [participating as] a sensitive party to the process of mutual learning, [the development agent] becomes a militant ideologue, [or] a self-appointed authority on people’s needs and strategies to meet them” (p. 124). Approaching participation from a co-construction perspective will ensure that the focus on communication processes remains central to the understanding of the process of participation, and will reduce the potential for development workers or agencies to control or manipulate situations in the name of “participation.” A vigilant focus on dialogue will reduce the chance that facilitators of development guide the project with their own agendas, and will encourage a process which is truly participatory.

Finally, it is important to remember that persons in dialogue are indeed *active* participants. As such, a co-construction perspective “affirm[s] that participants to interaction are not passive robots living out pre-programmed linguistic ‘rules’, discourse ‘conventions’, or cultural prescriptions for social identity” (Jacoby & Ochs, 1995, p. 177). This focus on active participation is consistent with and informs the drive to recognize the agency of participants in the PCD literature. If dialogue is necessary to the process of participation, then co-construction allows for a clearer envisioning of the communication processes involved in the overall social construction of a participatory development project. Participation is the result of co-constructed moments, which over time are repeated and shared and contribute to a *socially* constructed reality/understanding. Thus, when Jacobson and Servaes speak of the continual steps involved in PCD, it is important to understand that the transformatory interactions are co-

constructed in dialogue, and it is only over time and through extended shared networks that meanings/knowledge/change gets socially constructed.

Facilitating Participation

A second aspect of PCD that requires further consideration is the role of the development worker in facilitating participation. Significant questions remain about how (or if) local participation in a development project can be facilitated by an individual from outside of the community. Steeves (2000) cites the notion that “only certain people are capable of engaging in true participation” (p. 14). These “special” people are “those who have an unusual level of energy, intelligence, sensitivity, and inner freedom, and who are capable of a high degree of self-reflexivity” (p. 14). In Rahnema’s (1992) critique of participation, he concedes that the (few) examples of successful or true participation in development occurred when external agents “use[d] their personal gifts [and] acted as sensitive and compassionate catalysts” (p. 124) for participatory development.

Neither Steeves nor Rahnema describe clearly what it takes for a facilitator to be sensitive. Without a clear treatment of the requirements for appropriate or successful or desirable facilitation there is no foundation for future training or preparation of agents. Moemeka (2000) offers more concrete advice when he explains that in order for the agent to work with, rather than work for, the people, the “development communicator [must] know and understand ‘the way of life’ of that target social system” (p. 103). In his discussion of PAR, Tilakaratna (1991) discusses how agents might come to know the local way of life when he calls for the “creation of a cadre of sensitized agents who

have gone through a process of rigorous learning based on exposure to concrete experiences and self-reflection” (p. 137). He explains that sensitized agents will initially come from “socially conscious and active segments of the middle class” (p. 138), and that eventually the work of these agents will be taken over by local peoples. He lists the main elements of the learning process required to create sensitized agents including self-reflection, extended residency in a selected community, informal interaction with local people, and regular meetings with other trainees. Tilakaratna posits that through extended interaction with a community, and intermittent collective reflection with other trainees, the agent will begin “to show varying degrees of success in stimulating the people, with whom they had been interacting, to organize themselves so to initiate changes” (p. 139). Tilakaratna provides a clear space for use of a co-construction framework to further examine facilitation. In particular, how do interactions between agents (trainees or otherwise) and local people lead to greater participation? Tilakaratna does not examine the place of interaction in any detail, but Servaes and Arnst introduce the notion of trust as one way to look more carefully at the facilitation of participation.

Servaes and Arnst (1999) look to Freire in arguing for the importance of trust in participatory development, for Freire insists that trust is “an a priori requirement for dialogue” (as cited in Servaes & Arnst, p. 125). Servaes and Arnst place much importance on trust and insist that “it may be more important to know about trust than about educational standards, pedagogical methods, media technology, or communication benchmarks” (p. 125), yet they acknowledge that cultivating trust can

be a difficult goal. Beyond the assertion that “authentic listening fosters trust” (p. 126), the authors do not clearly explain how trust can be achieved. In another discussion of facilitation, Servaes (1999) goes further in describing trust and acknowledges that:

It will take some time to develop rapport and trust. Continued contact, meeting commitments, keeping promises, and following up between visits is important. Development of social trust precedes task trust. Both parties will need patience. (p. 89)

From this description we can see the similarities between Servaes’ and Tilakaratna’s requirements for facilitators. They must spend extended time in the community, interacting socially with local people in order to build trust and create the conditions for future participation. A co-construction perspective on trust can further explicate the communication processes involved in facilitation.

Co-construction requires that trust be understood relationally, rather than as an individual trait or personal characteristic. Facilitators on their own do not create the conditions for trust, for the conditions are negotiated in interaction. Rogers (1998) explains that trust “rests on the mutual predictability of other relative to self” (p. 80) and that this is constantly being negotiated in the relationship. Rogers describes this negotiation in terms of the “relational level information [which] is ‘given off’ within a given context [to] indicate how close or how far members are invited or allowed to be in the ‘distancing dance’ that is being performed” (p. 80), a dance which she emphasizes is co-constructed by the participants.

The dialogic co-construction of trust has also been examined in theories and research in interpersonal communication. Stewart (1978), among others, approaches interpersonal issues such as trust from a theoretical framework which privileges dialogic communication. From this perspective, humans are understood not as individuals, but as persons-in-relation, such that trust becomes a relational phenomenon. That is, trust will be constructed and perceived differently in each relational interaction, and can no longer be described as a personality trait or personal characteristic. Important to notions of facilitation, trust is developed and evolves over time, in that “a single episode can form the basis for future instances of trust and cooperation” (Good, 1988, p. 33). As with the process of participation, it is important to recognize the relationship between the co-construction of episodes of trust, and the larger social construction of facilitation. Over time, as the facilitator co-creates relational trust with various members of the community, those relationships form the foundation for a more durable, long-term social trust in the community.

Understanding trust from a co-construction perspective requires that the facilitator focus on interpersonal communication as the fundamental catalyst for participation. Implications for facilitation arise from this focus on trust as relationally co-constructed. If the facilitator understands that trust is built through conversation over time with various individuals, he or she will value informal conversations over public address or structured meetings. A long term focus on dyadic interaction will also help to break down the developer-subject/developpee-object dichotomy which Freire condemns in his discussions of education. A co-construction perspective makes evident that the agent (as

subject) is not involved in filling the local person (as object) with information. If the facilitator truly privileges interaction over information transfer, there is the potential for the experience to be mutually educational/transformational. And if the facilitator approaches the project with the goal of mutual learning, the risk that the facilitator will become a “militant ideologue” is diminished.

Valuing Local Knowledge

A final element of PCD that requires consideration is local knowledge. In their introduction to Theoretical Approaches to Participatory Communication, Jacobson and Servaes (1999) argue that “the knowledge, experience, and goals of local communities themselves must occupy a central role in development planning, execution, and evaluation” (p. 3). In his 1991 discussion of PAR, Fals-Borda explains that it is only through legitimation of “people’s science” that people are able to truly participate. Servaes and Arnst (1999) assert that “indigenous knowledge is inherently valid . . . [thus] this knowledge is the most valid place from which to begin” (p. 113). PCD, influenced by PAR and Paulo Freire, considers people as experts in their own realities, and that with the appropriate catalyst they are capable of changing their oppressive situations.

Rahman (1991) provides one of the most detailed treatments of indigenous knowledge and its role in participation in his discussion of the theoretical standpoint of PAR. Specifically, he questions the (positivist) argument that scientific knowledge is objective, and he echoes the position of social constructionists when he reminds that “the scientific character or objectivity of knowledge rests on its social verifiability, and

this depends on consensus as the method of verification” (p. 15). This argument is the foundation for Rahman’s assertion that people can “choose or devise their own verification system to generate scientific knowledge in their own right” (p. 15). The purpose of this legitimization of people’s knowledge is to provide the option for people to use their own knowledge (as well as any other knowledge system they deem worthwhile) in the process of creating solutions for their particular experiences of oppression. Rahman’s philosophy of knowledge is consistent with a social construction perspective on knowledge, but it is important to examine more carefully how a social construction perspective informs an understanding of knowledge, and to compare this understanding with the PCD perspective on local knowledge.

Because social construction assumes that all meaning is created in interaction, then knowledge also exists only in interaction. That is to say, the notion that a book or an “expert” contains knowledge which can be transferred to other individuals is false. This image of knowledge transfer is consistent with the encoding/decoding model of communication. As has already been elaborated, this model is not consistent with the social construction perspective, for it treats communication as an individual event and assumes that meaning is transferred, via a shared code system, from a sender to a receiver. In contrast, from a social construction perspective, knowledges are “situated versus decontextualized, positioned versus universal, historical versus timeless, interested versus disinterested, embodied versus disembodied, pluralistic versus unified, ethical versus instrumental, [and] dialogical versus monological” (Shotter & Gergen, 1994, p. 27).

A social construction perspective on knowledge thus supports the notion central to PCD that knowledges are situated and historical. However, social construction can add a critical understanding which is otherwise missing in theoretical treatments of PCD. Crotty (1998) warns that humans “tend to take ‘the sense we make of things’ to be ‘the way things are’” (p. 34). From this perspective, we co-construct and co-maintain knowledge and then immediately we forget that we do this. One reason for this social amnesia is the perpetuation of the encoding/decoding model of communication in both theorizing and in everyday conversation. If we continue to believe that meaning is something which resides in tasks or in an individual’s mind and that, through encoding and decoding it can be transmitted to other individuals, then we perpetuate the notion that knowledge is real, unchanging, and exists either within individuals or somewhere outside of individuals waiting to be read or learned or discovered. To take a social construction perspective, however, is to commit to the notion that knowledge is continually being created, negotiated and transformed, and as such, it is neither unchanging nor unchangeable.

This critical understanding of the construction of knowledge holds implications for the theory and practice of valuing local or indigenous knowledge in participatory development. Rahnema’s (1992) critical observation that “no one learns who claims to know already in advance” (p. 122) speaks to another of the theoretical problems of the valuing of local knowledge, in which an over-valuation of local knowledge may result in a simplistically static understanding of knowledge. Instead, knowledge “is the unknown which has to be *dis*-covered together” (p. 122). A social construction

approach to knowledge stresses the active construction of all knowledge, and questions the notion that knowledge can be “imposed” on a population. No one knowledge system is perfect, but together, people can construct knowledges capable of generating social change.

Examining PCD from a social construction perspective provided a framework for examining communication as the central element of this theory. Further development of the co-construction model provided insights into notions of dialogue. Then, in response to Waters’ call for a more focused analysis of PCD, I closely examined three elements of PCD from a social construction perspective to better understand the communication processes involved in the process of participation, the nature of facilitation, and the importance of local knowledge. Social construction highlights the fundamental importance of communication in all aspects of participatory development, but there is yet another important issue that has not been explicitly discussed in PCD. Retaining the social construction perspective, I turn now to feminism for insights into gender and PCD.

Chapter III

A Feminist Perspective

“Without progress in the situation of women, there can be no true social development. Human rights are not worthy of the name if they exclude half of humanity. The struggle for women’s equality is part of the struggle for a better world for all human beings and all societies”

- Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Former UN Secretary General

Feminism and Development

Since the earliest conceptions of international development, feminists have urged policy makers to consider the importance of women in development theory and practice. In 1970, Danish economist Ester Boserup’s pioneering work found that “women’s agricultural production was critical in sustaining local and national economies,” and also “provided documentary evidence of Third World women’s marginalization and lack of access to technology and resources after a decade of developing programming” (Visvanathan, 1997, p. 3). These findings motivated feminists to pressure governments and development agencies to consider women’s needs and position in the development process. As with theories of development, notions of women in development have changed substantially over the past fifty years, although the common theme remains that women’s needs must be considered in order to truly improve the lives of others through development.

There are three main approaches to women in development that, examined together, demonstrate diverse assumptions about the connections between gender and

development. Each of these approaches exemplifies an intersection between feminist theories and development theories. The three perspectives – Women in development; Women and development; and Gender and development – are neither mutually exclusive, nor exhaustive. They do, however, provide a conceptual framework for examining the history of perspectives concerning women in development.

Women in Development (WID). WID is the oldest and most dominant of the three perspectives, and is most clearly linked with modernist approaches to development and with liberal feminist ideals. Liberal feminists strive for equality for women, and would like to see the state help lift women up to the level of men, but to interfere as little as possible. WID grew from early attempts to give more prominence to the role of women in international development policy, and resulted in the 1975, 1980, 1985, and 1995 UN Conferences on Women. Similarly, in 1976, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was established to:

Help improve the living standards of women in developing countries by addressing their concerns through providing direct technical and financial support and by promoting the inclusion of women in the decision-making process of mainstream development programs (United Nations, 1995).

The goals of UNIFEM reflect the recent postmodern feminist critique that WID exemplifies an “add women and stir” mentality. The goal is to include women in existing development projects, but little attention is given to the unique nature of women’s needs. WID is heavily influenced (and supported) by liberal feminism/ists, as is evidenced in WID’s tendency to focus on “sexual inequality and ignore the structural

and socio-economic factors within which gender inequalities are embedded” (Visvanathan, 1997, p. 21). Although this initial approach raised global awareness of women’s issues, critics such as Porter (1999) charge that much more attention needs to be paid to the “differences in women’s situation, especially in terms of their reproductive role and responsibilities within the household” (p. 10). She also highlights the need to account for the intersections of such factors as class and ethnicity, and to admit that women’s experiences are not homogeneous.

Women and Development (WAD). Rather than simply devising strategies to better incorporate women into existing development projects, the WAD perspective takes an approach more in keeping with critical theory. Whereas WID is influenced by Modernist approaches to development and liberal feminism, WAD parallels Marxist or dependency approaches to both development and feminism. Thus, Marxist feminists and others who use the WAD framework “view the inequalities between women and men as part of the larger picture of the global economy” (p. 22). Unsurprisingly, WAD focuses on production and capitalism as the centers of oppression for women, and strives for structural changes to alleviate this oppression. WAD offers a more complex approach to issues of women in development, particularly with respect to notions of work and exploitation, and it demands structural change, rather than the individual change which is the focus of WID approaches.

In one critique of the radical nature of this perspective, Kabeer (1994) finds that “the uncompromising stand taken by Marxist and dependency feminists . . . restrict[s] their involvement in official efforts to address Third World women’s immediate needs”

(p. 53). Another critique of the WAD perspective finds that it focuses too heavily on economic impacts and restrictions. In evaluating both WID and WAD perspectives, van den Hombergh (1993) asserts that these approaches do “not question the assumptions of the dominant development paradigm” (p. 41).

Gender and Development (GAD). GAD notions emerged in response to criticisms of WID and WAD, and finds its roots in socialist feminism. GAD represents the most recent shift in perspective regarding women and development, and unlike WID and WAD begins to question the dominant development paradigm. The move from a focus on “women” to a focus on “gender” requires that proponents look at the social construction of gender, as well as at the social relations between men and women. Young (1997) explains that in addition to focusing on basic needs, the GAD approach stresses the importance of consciousness-raising. A GAD perspective strives to highlight/teach/support “the importance of organizing, of creating alliances and coalitions, of exerting influence, [and] of communication and public education” (p. 57). This focus is in contrast to early notions of women in development which focused solely on basic needs such as providing micro-credit opportunities, or educating women regarding birth control, without taking into account oppressive power structures, or flawed development policies.

Supporters of GAD insist that unlike WID and WAD perspectives, the approach works to alter the dominant development paradigm. Van den Hombergh (1993) cites the Canadian Council for International Cooperation’s gender manual in support of this perspective:

Gender and Development is part of the larger work of creating an alternative development model, for a world view which moves beyond an economic analysis to include environmental, sustainable and qualitative (personal, ethical and cultural) aspects in its definition of development. (p. 41)

However, critics of GAD charge that development agencies and governments have co-opted Gender and Development and use it to improve funding, or to include women's issues in the WID sense of "add women and stir," rather than in the original transformative sense of GAD.

Postmodern Feminism and Development. Beyond these three frameworks, feminists and development practitioners alike find that much work still needs to be done to improve the situation of women. Steeves (2000) maintains that "women's and girls' circumstances are substantially worse than those of men and boys in nearly every area of human need and human right" (p. 8). This in spite of (or because of?) over thirty years of attention paid to women in development. Wilkins (2000) insists that despite the fact that development "discourse has changed historically to attend to women's issues, interventions [still] fail to improve the conditions of women on a global scale" (p. 2). One source of problems in the improvement of women's lives is the co-optation and distillation of feminist ideals. Porter and Verghese (1999) lament:

The discourse of gender and development may once have been a radical and transformatory agenda for feminists, but the way in which it has been taken on by the mainstream funding agencies and governments in 'development' discourse pushes the radical politics of feminism to the margins. (p. 131)

The marginalization of feminism is unsurprising when we consider the incompatibility of feminism with traditional notions of development. One example of this incompatibility can be seen in issues of gender and access to power. Whereas feminists continue to fight for fundamental changes in power structures, and in particular for women's access to power, modernist development work seeks to promote traditional gendered power structures and relationships. On the other hand, feminism and participatory communication for development share many similar goals, and as such, feminist theory can further contribute to current notions of participation by providing a perspective not only on the extent to which PCD accommodates gender concerns, but also on notions of power.

Postmodern feminism is a particularly constructive perspective for this discussion because of its drive to "replace universal 'totalizing' theories with discourses that are historically situated, concrete, fragmented, flexible, and diverse" (Garry & Pearsall, 1996, p. 3). This goal is consistent with PCD's focus on local knowledge and emergent processes. According to Visvanathan (1997), postmodern feminism has also "fostered a growing awareness of the absence of race and class analysis in mainstream feminist thought" (p. 28). Feminists from developing countries, in particular, "have called for the inclusion of class and race in mainstream analyses" (p. 28). Thus, postmodern feminism, in concert with GAD approaches, provide for a perspective on participation which is sensitive to diversity.

Intersections: PCD, Postmodern Feminism, and GAD

Does participatory communication for development allow for a gender-sensitive approach to development? One way to approach this question is by examining PCD's intersections with postmodern feminism and GAD. Postmodern feminism and participatory communication for development share some similar goals, as both strive to "dismantle the 'grand narratives' or universal theories of traditional philosophies" (Garry & Pearsall, 1996, p. 3). Both postmodern feminists and proponents of PCD work against the prevailing modernist theories of development and of women. In its focus on local knowledges, PCD requires a localized, flexible approach to development, and rejects the modernist notion that there is one way to "develop" people/communities/nations. Similarly, postmodern feminism is "characterized by a multiplicity of voices. [It assumes] no single, objective account of reality, for everyone experiences things differently" (p. 3).

According to Riano (1994), a feminist approach to development demands that "any program or community process in implementing goals of participation must acknowledge the cultural and social forces underlying the dynamics of interaction in the community or group involved" (p. 23). The social construction perspective clearly accounts for cultural/historical forces in its perspective on knowledge and informs understandings of the dynamics of participation. As such, on the issue of culture, the intersection of feminism, social constructionism and PCD would be an especially fruitful collaboration.

Although GAD's focus on gender rather than on women alone is an important one, the fact remains that an examination of the inequalities between men and women, with the goal of changing the unequal situation, can be very unpopular with those who benefit from these inequalities. An effort to promote the participation of lower class women in a community may be seen as a threat by other members of the community. Crotty (1998) provides a response to this concern when he reminds that "patriarchy and sexism are not fetters worn by females only; they severely limit human possibility for males as well" (p. 162). To limit interaction with an entire segment of a community is to deny an entire range of voices and knowledges important to the process of participation. Clearly there needs to be more attention paid to this issue, particularly from a feminist perspective.

Additionally, Porter and Verghese warn that often "the social relations of gender are labeled as falling into the realm of culture and strong advocacy for a rethinking of gender relations would be seen as unwarranted 'cultural interference'" (p. 137). But from the critical perspective on local knowledge and culture presented earlier, culture is not something which exists intact and static, but is an ever-changing and ever-negotiated history of social constructions. To recognize culture as a product of people's own social constructions is to also recognize that restricting elements of culture (or knowledge) can be re-constructed in more supportive ways. In discussing the foundations of GAD, Young (1994) argues "that while women as individuals may well be aware of their subordinate position, this does not necessarily lead to an understanding of the structural roots of discrimination and subordination" (p. 51) that

may be present in a given cultural group. PCD is one way for women to achieve other, potentially useful understandings of their position so that they may begin to co-construct realities in which they no longer exist in a subordinate position.

Power

In addition to these intersections, postmodern feminism also raises issues that are complementary to the goals of participation, but have not been addressed in the theoretical approaches to date. In particular, feminist thinking has contributed to the understanding of issues of power in development. Gardner and Lewis (1996) explain that postmodern feminism has contributed to an “increasing awareness of the relationship between discourse . . . and power. From this, all categories which lump peoples or experiences together become politically suspect” (p. 21). To imagine that all women, or all “Third World” people are the same or can be presented as a coherent category is to perpetuate the modernist approach to development.

Given this study’s commitment to a social construction perspective on PCD, it is much more constructive to look at power at the level of interaction. Feminism has informed the discussion of power in development most notably through the concept of empowerment. The concept was popularized by Sen and Grown (1987) and has now been widely incorporated in both mainstream and alternative development discourses. Riano (1994) explains that “empowerment involves the transformation of women as social subjects of struggle and as active producers of meaning” (p. 18). Riano asserts that communication is at the heart of empowerment, for “any communicative interaction implies a negotiation of power” (p. 41), yet he recognizes that women’s subordination

constrains their participation in constructive social realities. Although women's communication in the public sphere is often restricted, this is not to say that they do not engage in power-negotiation in conversation within their households and other spheres of engagement. This notion of "spheres" of interaction raises an important issue for PCD, namely that participatory communication (and particularly facilitators' early, informal interactions) must span various spheres. It will not be consistent with the goals of participation to engage in communication simply in a public place, or simply in the participants' homes, or simply with men. The goal is not to "break the silence" of women, so much as it is to determine and alter the context within which women's communication is most common. The gender of the facilitator(s) becomes more important when we begin to address the connections between gender and power. It may ultimately be too difficult for a male facilitator to engage in empowering communication with a local woman, even with extensive prior relationship building.

Examining PCD from a postmodern feminist perspective provides a perspective on the extent to which PCD accommodates gender concerns and also on notions of power. Postmodern feminism and PCD share many similar goals, and as such, PCD has the potential to accommodate a gender-sensitive approach to development. Additionally, a feminist perspective allows for a clearer development of notions of power in PCD. The above analysis highlights the importance of power issues in communication, and provides suggestions for incorporating these issues in PCD theory and practice.

Chapter IV

Implications for Theory and Practice

In undertaking this project, I have attempted to clarify the nature of the communication processes involved in development in general and in participatory approaches to development in particular, as well as to examine participatory approaches using the insights of postmodern feminism. Both postmodern feminism and social construction contribute to the systematic elaboration of PCD and to a better understanding of its practice. The theoretical implications of this study will be useful in stimulating future theoretical elaboration, and the practical implications both will provide suggestions for action, and will direct practitioners to additional resources for facilitating participation.

Social Construction

PCD assumes implicitly what Gergen (1999) describes as the “power of language to make new and different things possible” (p. 18), but PCD does not currently treat communication as the primary process in participation for social change. In drawing on social construction, and more particularly on the concept of co-construction in communication, this study has addressed Jacobson and Kolluri’s (1999) call for a “framework explaining specifically what constitutes dialogue and how one might evaluate it as a communication process” (p. 273). Working within a co-construction model of communication, Stewart and Zediker (2000) present dialogue as prescriptive, relational, situated, and tensional, and make evident that a focus on dialogue values process over product. In more fully understanding dialogue, agencies and facilitators

can avoid Dervin and Huesca's (1999) critique that despite the focus on the process of participation, PCP nonetheless "ends up being conceptualized in nonprocess ways" (p. 177). Dialogue has been clearly examined both in terms of a co-construction perspective, and in terms of practical applications. In addition, both Stewart (1978) and Pearce and Pearce (2000) provide descriptions of the practical implementation of dialogue which can be useful for training facilitators in the practice of dialogue. Stewart develops a dialogic approach to interpersonal communication, and Pearce and Pearce examine how to facilitate dialogue as part of work with communities.

Another implication of adopting a co-construction approach is that the process of communication takes time. Servaes and Arnst (1999) and others make the point that PCD projects take more time, and that this is one of its more unattractive features to funding agencies. However, understanding the process of participation from a co-construction perspective helps to clarify why participation takes time. Clearly describing the way in which participation is socially constructed, over time, through repeated and networked face-to-face communication, may be one way to address funders or administrators who ask, "Why are they just sitting around? Shouldn't they be doing something?"

Beyond providing a framework for presenting PCD projects to funders, a co-construction perspective also helps to clarify the nature of facilitation. Indeed, it transforms the unhelpful notion that a good facilitator has a certain *je-ne-sais-quoi*, by providing a framework for understanding the communication processes involved in creating the type of trusting interaction seen as essential to PCD. Co-construction

points to work in interpersonal communication that positions trust as relational, and in so doing lends support to Freire's call for a move away from the Cartesian subject-object dichotomy to a more collaborative subject-subject approach. In understanding trust as relationally co-constructed, the facilitator focuses on creating a mutually educational/transformational interaction, rather than on trying to influence or affect another person. From this position, the facilitator is "first and foremost a situated interpreter, understander, or 'sense maker' engaged in everyday coping The person is irreducibly relational not individual, social not psychological" (Stewart, 1995, p. 26).

With respect to concerns in PCD with indigenous knowledge, a social construction framework is fully consistent with the drive to value local knowledge. To adopt this perspective on local knowledge is to discredit the popular encoding/decoding model of communication. This implies the further development of the theory of PCD will involve eliminating lingering encoding/decoding assumptions about communication processes. In addition, a social construction perspective contributes a critical element in understanding PCD constructions of knowledge. In particular, social construction insists that neither culture nor knowledge should be conceived of, or talked about, as systems imposed on communities/populations. Instead, those involved in PCD must focus on co-constructing new knowledges that validate both local and non-local knowledges in order to best approach problems, inequalities, or restrictions.

Feminism

Again, it is important to examine PCD from a feminist perspective, because "women's and girls' circumstances are substantially worse than those of men and boys

in nearly every area of human need and human right” (Steeves, 2000, p. 41).

Examining the intersections between PCD, postmodern feminism, and Gender and Development (GAD) points to similarities in goals, but also to areas where further development is required in order that PCD theory and practice be consistent with a feminist perspective. Feminist critiques of earlier attempts to include women’s issues in development make evident that gender, like communication, needs to be understood as central to participation. Gender is not simply an “element” to be considered, it is fundamental to the process of participation, and sensitivity to gender relations and issues of power must therefore be present in all aspects of theorizing and practicing participation.

Examining PCD from the perspective of postmodern feminism directs attention to the importance of cultural, racial, and class differences as factors contributing to oppression. Although PCD does not currently treat cultural differences in any clear way, drawing together insights from PCD, postmodern feminism, and the social construction perspective on knowledge may provide an especially fruitful multi-perspectival approach to diversity. This attention to inequalities also raises the issue of community resistance to participation. Feminists argue that attempts to include lower-class women in the development process are often met with resistance by those who currently benefit from the status quo. This problem has not been discussed in any detail in the participation literature, but it is one which must be addressed. The perspectives developed here suggest that to encourage participation by the least valued members of a community, the facilitator will have to acknowledge the postmodern feminist attention

to dismantling the conversations of traditional, oppressive voices, and replacing them with conversations of diverse voices.

Finally, a feminist perspective on PCD requires a clear treatment of notions of power. Feminism has informed the discussion of power in development most notably through the concept of empowerment (Sen and Grown, 1987). Feminist notions of empowerment are particularly useful here, as communication is at the heart of both empowerment and participation. In particular, a feminist analysis requires that facilitators and planners determine where and how men and women communicate, in order to evaluate their differential ability to participate, and to locate sites where women may be better able to participate, as for example, in a woman-friendly context such as a reproductive health center. A feminist analysis also alerts planners to the importance of the gender of the facilitator. It may be nearly impossible for a male facilitator to interact in a participative way with lower class women, which may require consideration of facilitation “teams” rather than single individuals. Examining notions of PCD from a feminist perspective raises more questions than it answers, but because the goals of PCD and postmodern feminism are consistent, there is the potential for rewarding future development of both theory and practice.

This study has provided foundations for future work in both the conceptual and practical arenas. From a social construction perspective we are able to provide clearer treatment of the communication processes involved in and central to participation. From a feminist perspective, we see again the inequalities within communities, but with

further treatment of the intersections between feminism and PCD, there is potential for a gender-sensitive approach to participation.

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